

north of Thingbu, high up on the alpine pastures of the Great Himalaya, the sambar is out of the question. Schaller *et al.* (1996) also mentioned that even in Tibet, it is confused with the white-lipped deer *Cervus albirostris* by the locals (as both are called *sha* by the Tibetans), but that is not the case here, as the range of *albirostris* is nowhere near the Indian border.

From the map in Schaller *et al.* (1996), it appears that the upper reaches of the Subansiri

river could still hold some potential *shou* habitat, as no survey has ever been carried out in that portion to date (Fig 1). Gee (1964) also suspected the presence of a few *shou* in the area.

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4. HIMALAYAN MARMOT *MARMOTA BOBAK* (MULLER) RESIGHTED AFTER EIGHT YEARS AT KYONGNOSLA ALPINE SANCTUARY, EAST SIKKIM

The Himalayan marmot *Marmota bobak* has been regularly observed in the trans-Himalayan region of north Sikkim in Lhonak valley, Lashar and Yumesamdong valleys, and the Chho Lhamo plateau at altitudes from 4,500-5,500 m. In July 1992, four adult marmots were recovered from captivity from Kerang on the Chho Lhamo plateau and from Pegong near Tsungthang in north Sikkim, but could not be released in the wild due to various logistic and other problems. They were brought to the Head Office of the Department of Forests, Environment & Wildlife at Deorali, Gangtok (1,500 m). They had been tied with wires and their teeth were broken. As the office had no facilities or experience to treat or keep them, they were taken for release almost immediately to a higher altitude, to the 31 sq. km Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary (*c.* 4,000 m) around 20 km from Gangtok on the way to Natu La in East Sikkim. There was no opportunity to age or sex them, as the animals were highly stressed and held in wooden cartons.

The site of release within the sanctuary was

at Namnang, beyond an area locally called Raja Dhunga, or King Rock. The sanctuary staff, Bishnu Kumar Sharma and Jeevan Kumar Rai, released the animals. They were infrequently observed in the area for a short period, after which they were not seen. It was presumed that the already traumatised animals did not survive in this unfamiliar terrain.

However, one adult marmot was resighted on August 24, 2000 at 1645 hrs about 4 km from the site of release in the Sola Firing Range area. The same two staff who were patrolling the sanctuary, spotted the marmot. The animal emerged from beside a big rock, a short while after it stopped raining. They observed it for about 10 minutes from a distance of *c.* 50 m, feeding on grasses and herbs. It hid when approached. The spot was very close to the owner of a yak 'goth' — (cattle camp) Mr. Sangey Sherpa, whose son also saw it. He informed that another marmot had been sighted further up from this site.

It might not have been such a good idea to introduce the injured animals to this sanctuary with predators like hill fox *Vulpes vulpes* and

yellowthroated marten *Martes flavigula* and with apparently no history of marmot occurrence (C. Lachungpa, *pers. comm.*). However, it is interesting to note that two may have survived the ordeal, and it is an indication that marmot life span in the wild could be at least eight years.

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5. TWO WHALE RECORDS FROM TAMIL NADU, SOUTHERN INDIA

Recently, the media reported two different occurrences of a large whale running aground in Tamil Nadu.

The first of these instances took place in November 2000. Newspapers and television channels reported that a whale was stranded near Point Calimere. Their accounts said that the whale was stuck in mud and that it had been languishing there for 40 days or more. On November 14, the Coast Guard and others attempted to rescue the stricken animal and I was able to witness this effort from close quarters.

The whale was stranded in *c.* 1.25 m water at a location south of Point Calimere that took about an hour to reach by trawler. The bottom was clayey, and the water was quite brown and muddy. Further, the only parts of the whale that appeared frequently above the surface were its blowhole and snout. Nevertheless, over the course of the operation to save the creature, I was able to note the following features:

Shape: slender and long.

Length: about 12 m, roughly equal to that of the trawlers used to move it.

Dorsal fin: triangular, backward slanting, about 30 cm high; trailing edge frayed. Placed at about two-thirds the total length of the whale, from the snout.

Tail flukes: large.

Flippers: could not be seen.

Colour: black overall; belly white, possibly a little pink. Large white scars on the back between the blowhole and the fin.

Rostral ridges: three distinct longitudinal ridges running from the blowhole towards the

tip of the snout, the middle one considerably more raised than the other two.

On the basis of these observations, I identified the stranded whale to be a Bryde's whale *Balaenoptera edeni*. The three ridges on the top of the head are diagnostic (Jefferson *et al.* 1993, Leatherwood and Reeves 1983, Watson 1981).

The second whale came ashore near Poothurai village of Kanyakumari district. On January 18, 2001, *The Hindu* carried an item about this whale. It said that a stranded whale was rescued by the villagers and officials, and had swum back to the sea. The Tamil newspaper *Dinakaran* carried a colour photograph of the whale on the same day, lying at the edge of the water. The caption said that the whale was "50 feet long and 10 feet high". According to this paper, the whale was entangled in fishermen's nets and was brought to the shore.

The snout and right side (front part) of the whale are visible in the published photograph. The whale was evidently a humpback *Megaptera novaeangliae*: it had the throat grooves or ventral furrows characteristic of a rorqual; its flipper appeared long and narrow, and it had the unmistakable knobs on top of the head. Further, no ridge was visible along the midline on top of the head, and the colour of the animal was black and white.

After intense search of the literature, I found only a few records of the Bryde's whale and humpback whale from India:

Bryde's Whale

i) Date not known, recorded by Blanford